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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the moral role of the education profession, discusses the virtuous educator, and examines H. Sockett's concept of "in loco parentis" for the educator and implicitly the education profession. Sockett holds that teachers must work as ambassadors for public education in promoting the school's mission and concern for children. The teaching profession has been weakened by social trends, legal decisions, and lack of community support. Sockett's antidote to a weakened teaching profession is the introduction of professional development schools where university and local school faculty fashion a microcosm of the united profession. Sockett has identified five elements that exemplify professional virtue: honesty, courage, care, fairness, and practical wisdom. Sockett contends that society's moral vacuum, collapse of the family, and disappearance of childhood are testimony to the need for the virtuous educator. According to Sockett, the essential moral nature of the profession demands a return to an "in loco parentis" paradigm, but this paper argues that certain domains are the sole province of parents. The paper concludes: "To expect the return of the parental model for the educator is to operate in dissonance with our multifaceted society, its problems, and its opportunities as well as its sometimes frantic pace." (JDD)

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# Reflections on the Moral Content of the Professional Community vs. Moral Demands of the Community: Focus on Sockett's Moral Base for Teacher Professionalism

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**Reflections on the Moral Content of the Professional Community vs. Moral Demands of the Community: Focus on Sockett's Moral Base for Teacher Professionalism**

The implicit moral demands of professional alignment and its relation to the moral demands of the community provide the focus of Sockett's thought-provoking work. Morality--its definition, standards, and consequences--is a powerful force within both the professional community and the shared public community of neighborhood, city, state, and nation. Sockett discusses both communities'--professional and social--standards of morality. He tenders his perception of the professional community, its professional content, and the possibility of conflict between the two communities in moral expectations, roles, and power. The role of the educator receives Sockett's attention because in that person's function the professional community connects with the larger community, the parents, and the child both academically and morally. Included in this paper's discussion are the description of the profession and its moral role, a discussion of the virtuous educator, and Sockett's concept of in loco parentis for the educator and implicitly the education profession.

**Education Profession**

According to Sockett, the education profession composed of academics, practitioners, and administrators has a common collegiality which needs exploiting and encouragement. The profession is dedicated

to engendering learning. The community of teaching is identified by expertise, both of discipline and pedagogy, and is professionally accountable. The tri-partite profession can be in opposition or in cooperation within its varied membership. Consequently, expectations of the professional community, as described in Sockett's work, can be diverse in moral choices concerning the child, educational programs, and the role of the educator/school vis-a-vis parents or the community as a whole. Sockett's work provides an arena for the discussion of parents' rights, rights of the child, community control of education, and educators' choices and moral obligations (Sockett, pp. 24-25).

The profession owes a moral responsiveness to its clients (which includes the public community). Professional ideals envision the goal of human betterment. Teaching historically is considered a calling. It is legitimate to inquire if those high ideals can function independently of or in opposition to parental and/or community standards or expectations. Sockett holds teachers must attain high level

> development of an increasing sophistication in working with parents in groups and as individuals in the promotion of the school's mission and in the individual concern for their children with the public as ambassador for public education. (Sockett, p. 31).

Reflective practitioners, in Sockett's view, consider their role in designing the curriculum, testing, being accountable, and supporting the growth of the learner. Teachers' autonomy is threatened by censorship, community power groups, and administrative interference or disinterest. The teaching profession has been weakened by social trends, legal decisions, and lack of community support.

Sockett's antidote to a weakened teaching profession is the introduction of professional development schools where university and local school faculty fashion a microcosm of the united profession. Sockett himself has initiated such a program. There, both general principles and the ambiguous challenging world of the teaching-learning situation are confronted. The ideal of the united profession is exemplified in the professional development school. Teachers learn how to construct teaching-learning strategies, build curricula, and assume leadership roles in dealing with both colleagues and parents. A high moral level is expected. But, one must remember, professional interpretations and those of community and/or parents may differ sharply even when all parties agree on a set of ethical standards.

Sockett notes British teachers have long been more autonomous than their American counterparts in both classroom and curricular style and control. The British model's focus is individualistic; whereas, the American is more concerned with system-wide management and public

requirements. Sockett's own view, consciously or not, reflects the British paradigm--in teaching, school organization, and community relations.

**Five Virtues**

To Sockett, the teaching act occurs in a moral context. It is in a dialectical interplay with both children and their parents--both of whom are cultural agents. Within the interchange of the three--particularly the teacher and learner--they choreograph a teaching act exemplifying professional virtue. Honesty, courage, care, fairness, and practical wisdom are the elements of virtue. Reflecting these graces, the profession and the individual practitioner can be trusted with society's greatest wealth--its children (Sockett, p. 63).

A brief overview presents the essence of Sockett's array of moral attributes--the five virtues. Avoiding deception, differentiating fact from fiction, being concerned for the truth, being trustworthy in class--all are facets of the teacher's concept of the truth. In reference to courage, making prudent, careful judgments in troubled circumstances, being courageous both personally and professionally contribute to the second professional virtue. Exhibiting sensitivity in dialogue with individuals and handling groups with empathy reflect the educator's model for care. Fairness is an ever present demand for just treatment of both learners and representatives of the public. The virtuous educator retains a sense of

equity in the conflict and travail experienced in many contemporary educational issues. Practical wisdom is a summative trait demonstrated by the reflective educator as s/he confronts the multiple and often simultaneously occurring demands in one's professional life (Sockett, pp. 62-88).

**In Loco Parentis**

Sockett's estimable professional is presented within the context of in loco parentis. The essential moral nature of the profession demands a re-energized return to a traditional paradigm. Modeling, unintentional preferably, all the professional graces, the educator becomes teacher and partner with children in their educational growth. Political activism and ideological pronouncements and stands in the elementary grades are all Sockett-approved. All of these traits of the virtuous educator may concern parents, community members, and other professionals. The questions of what is the activity or to what degree as well as manner of implementation within the cultural and educational context of teacher acts--all need to be individually examined. Elementary vs. middle school vs. senior high students--all relate differently to theory and its consequences in school activities and in the larger world (Sockett, pp. 139-142.).

Sockett's educator reveals the private person within the professional role. He contends this is needed but is blocked by the litigiousness of American society and the maze of due process regulations controlling

school people and school life. His point is well taken. Every newscast of teachers accused of criminal or unacceptable behavior encourage new sanctions or new regulations on teacher conduct and class activities. Close human relationships, as Sockett contends, are discouraged because of community suspicions or fears.

Another aspect of the in loco parentis model is Sockett's belief in the teacher's enthusiasms--politically, aesthetically, and ideologically--being bared and impacting the teacher-pupil relationship. All aspects of the partnership present exciting avenues to explore. The paragon educator assumes the parental role easily and with zest. However, some of Sockett's examples cause some discomfort. Assessing a child's dilemma in following her parents' religion is viewed by Sockett as upholding her constitutional rights but may also be interpreted as intruding into the family's religious freedom. It is commendable to discuss various religious perspectives in class but precarious, if not unjustifiable, to advise on choice of church. Sockett contends society's moral vacuum, collapse of the family, and disappearance of childhood are testimony to the need for the virtuous educator. One wonders, in the case of church choice, if Sockett would be as approving if the child were from a Unitarian family rather than Fundamentalist. Communities vary, and some might be less affronted than others at the strong parental role of the educator. Educators can agree on the moral needs of today's children as well as the

need for the teacher as role model but disagree with Sockett's advise (Sockett, pp. 146-147).

The teacher playing both parent and educator could confuse the child even when advice is sought. Whatever the ineptness of parents, they are the ones with whom the teacher must work. Considering institutional weaknesses in society, teachers along with parents and community members need to repair the damage together while recognizing certain domains are the province of parents and others that of educators. It is a challenging task to improve the moral fabric of our educational and social lives. Educators exemplifying the five virtues are needed. Sockett's autonomous teacher and profession remains a subtle but powerful influence beneath his proposals for improving the lot of children and society in general. A degree of benevolent elitism characterizes Sockett's description of the educator, the professional community with its many records and omnipresent channels of communication, and relationships of school and society. His model of teacher and profession are at odds with the modality of American schools and society.

Socket cites the immigrant parents' need for a sense of comfort with the traditional teacher role of in loco parentis. The role of parental stand-in, one with complete parental support, is in most cases a relic of the past. Immigrant parents, depending on their background, might hunger for the in-charge educator but their dependence reflects their own insecurity in an

alien situation. To ready both parent and child for our complex, demanding, and often confusing society, educators individually and as a profession enable all the actors in the family constellation to recognize their duties, rights, and roles in the educational and social process. Each can be judiciously guided in establishing their own goals, boundaries of personhood, and places of access between them and the shared social world. We are not living in the simple, rural world of colonial times or in the era of the immigrant rush to be Americanized and become part of the melting pot. Rather we exist in an epoch where multicultural concerns, economic challenges, literacy problems, and moral dilemmas are the daily fare of educators. Today's educators are concerned with parental neglect, children's needs, and a general social angst. The temper of our times requires the empowered virtuous educator as Sockett argues--whether it is one who assumes the in loco parentis role is arguable.

**The School**

The school site for Sockett's educator is crucial for his model teacher. He uses British examples which have their own cultural/historical characteristics that differentiate them from American models. He also alludes to an American private school. Its goals, activities, and means of evaluation, as well as its special teaching corps, all have the loyalty and trust of parents and children. Here the teacher with all of Sockett's virtues

functions comfortably. Their's is a unique environment where the professional role, partnership with the child, and allegiance of the parents are conjoined. Parental financial support and control of the school contributes to a familial environment. The many settings of public education encompassing comfortable suburban, isolated rural, and turbulent inner city indicate variety, complexity, and multiplicity in problems and solutions. Professionals acclimate themselves to each environment, intuitively or with conscious choice. The challenge to prepare each child to be an ethical, intelligent, and caring person is one for each teacher as well as the entire profession. We need virtuous teachers exhibiting courage, truth, fairness, and practical wisdom.

**Summary-Conclusions**

Sockett's five virtues define his model educator, the profession's representative to both parents and children. The moral educator presents a complex array of talents and moral principles. They are the armamentarium to confront educational challenges and opportunities. Trusting the teacher is important to both learners and parents. It is the teachers who guide and protect the community's future, its children. Being courageous, in the sense of allegiance to one's duty of pursuing the truth, is as old as Socrates' career. Sockett notes that in the era of accountability, performance evaluation, management by objectives, and outcome-based

learning it is difficult for an educator to display the courage of one's convictions (Sockett, p. 76). Today's teachers are restricted and confined in implementing their beliefs. It is true educators chafe under mounting rules and regulations. But does not every era present challenges to the courageous? Regarding the virtue care, Sockett contends in loco parentis is "critical to the sense of caring for children. [But] it has been driven out by due process" (Sockett, p. 78). Bureaucracy, tests, and a sense of competition--all limit the teacher's care of the child. Here one puzzles: Why must the educator expect complete non-interference from others (perhaps even the birth parents) in implementing concern for the learner?

In a similar vein, Sockett holds that not only should the teacher communicate feeling for the children but also should telegraph one's needs to have reciprocated feelings from the children (Sockett, p. 79). Are children expected to tender to the teacher's psyche while facing their own dilemmas? The teacher-pupil relationship implied is one of inclusion of both parties, both responsible for the other. The learner's immaturity and need to focus on his/her own becoming is reason enough to exclude immersion in the educator's problems. In Sockett's view, care extends to the teacher's close monitoring of interindividual relationships within the class in reference to balancing personalities as well as focusing on gender issues, leadership roles, and learning needs. In its specificity, the educator's planning resembles that of a general mapping a campaign. It

is understood that attention to those generalized criteria is a part of every educator's function, but the classroom is also a place of choice, ambiguity, chance, and change. Particularized social engineering inhibits the free flow of the classroom and the interaction of its inhabitants. Some outcomes which the teacher may not have envisioned can be educationally and personally fruitful.

In questions of equity, one must agree with Sockett, to behave justly as an educator one acts appropriately as well as differently to each learner. To Sockett the educator who questions one's own pedagogical choices exemplifies practical wisdom. One expects the dedicated educator to combine reflectiveness, judgment, and action. Sockett's virtuous educator is a paragon. Historically, teachers have been expected to be role models of virtue. Does their role require one to perceive the educator operating in loco parentis? The response of the writer is negative.

Others have presented constructs of the virtuous educator, the one devoted to character education. Martin Buber's I-Thou dialogue between teacher and pupil describes a virtuous image with special emphasis on care. His teacher and the relationship with the pupil resists imitating the position or the love of the parent for the child. Rather, Buber focuses on the loving but unique relationship of educator to and with the learner. Inclusiveness is there but it is one-sided, from the teacher. To Buber,

> [t]he educator who practices the experience of the other side and stands firm in it, experiences two things together, first that he is limited by otherness and second that he receives grace by being bound to the others.... But however intense the mutuality of giving and taking with which he is bound to his pupil, inclusion cannot be mutual in this case. (Buber, pp. 100-101).

Evolving models for educators grow from the intermingling of professional goals and conduct with the values, strengths, and needs of the community. As the country changes so does the partnership of parent and educator as well as the model profession. To expect the return of the parental model for the educator is to operate in dissonance with our multifaceted society, its problems, and opportunities as well as its sometimes frantic pace. We need the dedicated education profession and the virtuous educator but in a different modality from Sockett's proposal.

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